

**Democracy, institutional entrepreneurship and socio-political performance:
the contribution of management science to a reassessment of traditional
associationism**

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Although the 2008 global crisis led to a questioning of the relevance and sustainability of a mode of development exclusively based on a global liberalism ruled by finance, the « *great transformation* » (Polanyi, 1944) is already back on track, with an extension of the market to all areas of society, including the nonprofit sector. In this context, “*social entrepreneurship*” is often presented as the best way for nonprofit organizations (NPOs) to survive. However, we argue that this economic adaptation deeply undermines the socio-political dimension of the nonprofit movement and, in doing so, distorts its original nature and purpose. Drawing on Laville’s (2010) “*associationist*” approach to nonprofit organizations on the one hand, and on Di-Maggio’s (1988) “*institutional*” approach to entrepreneurship on the other, we situate nonprofit action at the nexus of the economic and socio-political spheres, opening up new possibilities for alternative transformations of society.

Over the past two decades, a growing number of political leaders have begun to refer to the social entrepreneurship approach to nonprofit organization. Drawing on Dees's (1998) seminal text, American literature defines social entrepreneurship as a series of strategies aiming to acquire more resources in order to achieve more efficiently social goals. In this view, the adaptation of nonprofit organizations to the great transformation can be interpreted as a form of effectiveness. However, this approach situates the action of the nonprofit sector almost exclusively within the economic sphere. From our point of view, this adaptation of the nonprofit sector to the new ultra-liberal world has led to the « *great transformation* » of the “*associationist*” movement. It could be viewed the last of a long series of attempts from both, the state and the market, to undermine the socio-political dimension of the nonprofit sector (Laville, 2010). While economic development constitutes a necessary means to empowerment and emancipation for people and groups demanding their rights to be respected (Laville, 2010), economic development alone can also lead to a dependency trap. Social entrepreneurship introduces a risk of commodification of the nonprofit sector.

The “*associationist*” approach to the nonprofit sector highlights the coming together of people for a common cause (Laville, 2010). These organizations introduce a unique combination of economic and socio-political action leading to members' empowerment and ability to make significant changes in society. Even when these changes are not directly targeted, they often emerge from the empowerment and emancipation of the people coming together in these organizations. In view of this, the present paper examines alternative strategies that nonprofit organizations may adopt as they face the “*great transformation*”. While most scholars, drawing on a classical approach to management science promote a social entrepreneurship pathway aiming to carry on the achievement social ends by adapting the means; this paper, drawing on a

broader approach to management science based on institutional entrepreneurship, explores alternative pathways. Institutional entrepreneurs can be defined as “*actors who leverage resources to create new or transform existing institutions*” (Battilana, Leca & Boxenbaum, 2009, p. 68). In this view, the social, economic and political resistance of nonprofit organizations to the great transformation can be interpreted as a form of socio-political effectiveness.

New forms of organization will eventually emerge from this institutional entrepreneurship approach to the nonprofit sector. However, one of the aims of this paper consists in changing the way management science looks at traditional nonprofit organizations, in particular small solidarity-based grassroots nonprofit organizations. Often seen as a failure from a social entrepreneurship point of view, their contributions can be dramatically reevaluated when viewed to the lens of « institutional entrepreneurship » achievements : they feed society with ideas and experimental action, in the margin of the mainstream. Local rather than global, practical rather than ideological, their existence and survival implicitly questions the new ultra-liberal norms. They momentarily and locally demonstrate the sustainability of alternative forms of development.

1. The traditional place of the nonprofit sector in society

One of the most well-known attempts to define nonprofit organizations was proposed by the international team of research lead by Salamon and Anheier within the Hopkins project (1997). Their goal was to carry out a comparative analysis of the nonprofit sector in 12 different countries. Five criteria were selected to determine the organizations that could be part of the group under study: these were organized i.e. with an institutional existence, private i.e. separated

from the public sector, non-profit distributing, self-governing i.e. having a board of their own to define their orientation, voluntary: i.e. involving, to some extent, voluntary donations or voluntary unpaid workers, even if this only concerns members of the board. Many definitions have been proposed since then, each of these five criteria can be challenged and debated, some could be emphasized or moderated, but they are, nevertheless, representative of a classical approach to these organizations.

Different typologies have tried to structure the diversity of the nonprofit sector. As far as the activity is concerned, Salamon and Anheier (1997) have developed the following classification: culture and leisure, education and research, health, social service, environment, development and housing, law, advocacy and politics, philanthropic intermediates and voluntarism promotion, international, religion, business and professional associations and unions. One of the most used distinctions is between advocacy and service (Mintzberg et al, 2005 ; Nicholson, 2009), the first one tries to change people's opinions whereas the second tries to change the world in more immediate and concrete ways, both being of course very useful. Another distinction concerns the beneficiaries: some nonprofit ventures serve their members whereas some serve others (Mintzberg et al, 2005). The first instance rejoins the principal of mutual and cooperative collective action (Rothschild & Stephenson, 2009) ; the second refers to philanthropic and altruistic movements (Sulek, 2009). Another difference often referred to is the presence or absence, next to the volunteers, of paid workers (Van Vuuren, de Jong & Seydel, 2008). But beyond their observable actions and activities, the specific nature of nonprofit organizations lies in the way they combine and integrate socio-political and economic means and ends.

	Means – Ways	Result – Ends – Output
Techno-Economic Level	Efficiency Productivity	Goods and services responding to a need
Socio-political Level	Collective action Shared values Social bonds	Impact Social change

Table 1. Socio-political and economic means and ends of NPOs

From an economic point of view, nonprofit organizations have often been referred to as the “third sector”. They are analyzed as organizations producing goods or, more often, services with the purpose of supplying demands that have been ignored or neglected by the private profit sector and by public services (Salamon & Anheier, 1997). With this in mind, one of the main issues with the economic view of NPOs concerns the added value of this production. For many authors, one of the main difficulties is the separation between those who finance and those who benefit from these activities (Valéau, 2004). Beyond the economic value of the means involved, many authors underline the social, and sometimes indirect, usefulness of these goods and services.

The sociological view of nonprofit organizations analyses the NPO as a network integrating individuals within the society (Mintzberg, 1983 ; Rothschild & Stephenson, 2009). This social integration would include the creation of jobs for people who are usually excluded from the other sectors as well as the sense of belonging provided by volunteering. Volunteers and paid workers’ motivations (Jamison, 2003) and commitment (Boezeman et Ellemers, 2007) often differ

significantly from those of workers in other organizations. According to this psycho-sociological approach, the performance of these NPOs relies, beyond activities, on the way they work. NPOs' members share common values on the basis of which they get committed to spontaneous collective action (Boezeman and Ellemer, 2007). This aspect of NPOs can be connected to Durkheim's mechanical solidarity that characterizes traditional society (1915). It can also refer to the mechanism identified by Kanter (1968) used in utopian communities to commit their members. These social links constitute for the venture a social capital (Grady & Wang, 2009) which stands as a means and an end.

The political view emphasizes the part NPOs play as agents of change within the society in which they find themselves: most of them may be more or less directly and more or less explicitly working for a "better world" (Kanter & Summers, 1987; Cooperrider et Passmore, 1991; Strichman, Bickel & Marshood, 2008). Different NPOs may target different levels of change: some want to alter people's behaviour, others are just trying to answer their needs, others are trying to change people's mentality. Authors such as Eisenberg (2000) emphasize the second : *"The extraordinary problems that are tearing at the fabric of our society as we enter the 21st century, poverty, racism, environment degradation, lack of health protection, declining trust in government and many others, can only be tackled by strong policy work, advocacy and citizen mobilization. They will not be resolved by better services, and programs, although these are important. A much greater portion of our nonprofit activities in the future will have to be devoted to policies and action that can produce change."* (p 325). These actions involve very open and sometimes indirect impacts, and as such remain very difficult to measure (Kanter & Summers, 1987).

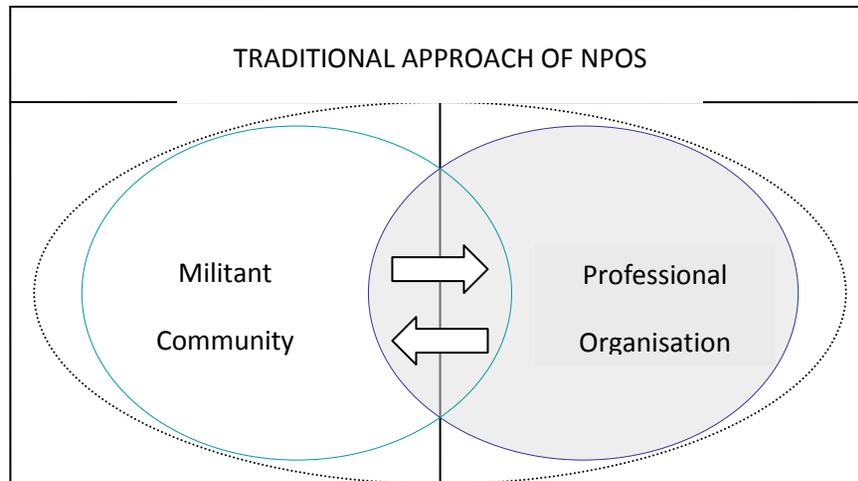


Figure 1. The dual nature of nonprofit organization (inspired from Valéau & Sharma, 2010)¹

The management view of nonprofit organizations questions the articulation of the three above dimensions. Indeed, most of these ventures may, by definition, be, to a certain extent, concerned with them all, but different proportions and configurations are possible depending on the values and the purpose of the organization. A lot of discussions consider NPOs along a continuum going from informal community to professionalized organization (eg. Anheier, 2005; Simon, 2009). But this development maybe not as harmonious. Valéau & Sharma (2010) consider that nonprofits are made of two distinct entities, a community and professional organization, eventually overlapping and almost certainly interacting (figure.1). In fact professional efficiency often contradicts community values (Rothschild & Stephenson, 2009). The importance of community, its overlap and interactions with the organization vary from one non-profit venture to another. It often declines as the latter becomes more professional. Nevertheless, in most cases, nonprofit organizations succeed in saving a community base with values based action. Most NPOs aim, to a modest or ambitious extent, to work for a better and more sustainable development of the world.

¹ Sharma developed a similar figure to account for the dual nature of family businesses

Indeed, most of them introduce new ideas and propose change. However moving on from this, a new approach, social entrepreneurship, is now emphasizing radically more professional organization.

The tensions between informal community and professionalized organization probably explain part of the failure of the globalization of the nonprofit sector. Alterglobalization was supposed to be the nonprofit answer to market globalization, providing a counter power able to stop its excess and providing society with alternative models of development. This movement had its glory days at the end of the 90s with demonstrations in Seattle, followed, in the early 2000s, by social forums systematically responding to the Davos Economic Forums. The alterglobalization movement involves a very large range of nonprofit organizations, big NGOs and small grassroots ones, professional advocate groups and radical political parties. The movement rapidly met difficulties in coordinating with a common voice and a common line of action. All of them shared aspirations for a better world, but some were looking for an evolution of the system, others wanted a revolution. To date the alterglobalization movement has still not found its second wind.

2. Social entrepreneurship and the adaptation of the nonprofit sector to the “*great transformation*”.

Authors such as Gartner (1990) have always kept the door of the field of entrepreneurship open to NPOs, but it is only during the last decade that this branch area has been institutionalized as part of a new stream of research labeled: “social entrepreneurship”. It has helped to import the concept of entrepreneurship within the context of NPOs. Social entrepreneurship can be

connected to a broader set of contributions, supporting the introduction of management practices such as marketing for fund raising, job profile and evaluation for human resources management, cost controlling for accountancy and strategic planning for general management (Anheier, 2005 ; Herman, 1994 ; Simon, 2009; Stevens, 2001). All these contributions support innovation in the sense of a rationalizing approach based on the use of tools from for profit businesses.

Social entrepreneurship research does not only study NPOs, but has a vocation to study a large variety of activities developed along a continuum going from the profit to the nonprofit sector, including the public sector (Dees 1998 ; Johnson, 2000 ; Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern, 2006 ; Townsend and Hart, 2008). It can either concern businesses with a social commitment or nonprofit or public organizations trying to improve their efficiency (CCSE, 2001). Prabhu (1999) considers that social entrepreneurship can take all kinds of legal forms including new ones. A large number of texts even value this “in between” as part of social entrepreneurship. For Townsend and Hart (2008), the choice of a given form of organization depends on the nature of the project; including social goals within a project essentially for profit or introducing efficiency in a nonprofit venture. For Wallace (1999), social entrepreneurs create new models of organizations that narrow the borders between the profit and the nonprofit sector. For Johnson (2000) this hybridization is a fundamental part of the innovations social entrepreneurship produces to answer the complexity of the problems it addresses. As a result, nonprofit organizations in the traditional sense as defined by Salamon and Anheier (1997) can be part of this larger group practicing “social entrepreneurship”.

Social entrepreneurship is often defined by referring to its goals, such as the use of entrepreneurial behaviors for social purposes (Hibbert, Hogg, Quinn, 2002). More precisely, it is

often introduced as an attempt to solve social problems efficiently and creatively (Wallace, 1999 ; Johnson, 2000 ; Hibbert, Hogg, Quinn, 2002). Social entrepreneurship is driven by individuals wanting to improve society and considering that the classical approach of profit and nonprofit organizations cannot correctly address this issue. Social entrepreneurship reintroduces values and social considerations within the profit context and assesses performance in attracting and retaining human resources, fund raising and finance in a nonprofit sector often viewed as inefficient (Dees, 1998).

Social entrepreneurship is very focused on the acquisition of resources. It recommends nonprofit organizations not to use public grants (Boschee, 2001 ; Brunham, 2002). The first reason is because these may not be safe as they could be taken away, arbitrarily, at any time. The second reason is that grants create a dependency on the public sector which is in contradiction with the principle of independence that characterizes entrepreneurship as well as the nonprofit sector. Social entrepreneurship prefers private donations from people and businesses. They propose fund raising techniques using marketing tools. But social entrepreneurship has a preference for commercial activity able to produce a « real » income. This can involve selling a service to the beneficiary. It can also consist in selling another profitable service in order to finance a social non-profitable action. This commercial dynamic matches the entrepreneurial spirit of opportunity creation. But these authors also consider this to be real value creation compared to grants and donations which, according to them, mainly consist in the redistribution of money taken from others.

One of the main issues of social entrepreneurship is the measure of performance. Social entrepreneurship would like to integrate economic and sociological added values, trying to assess

the level of efficiency of these organizations (Dees 1998; Johnson, 2000; Hibbert, Hogg, Quinn, 2002; Austin and al., 2006; Townsend and Hart, 2008). This approach often involves a ratio confronting the output produced with the means invested. Social entrepreneurship has tried to introduce innovation and efficiency into the nonprofit venture equation. Most authors agree on the difficulty, in the forprofit as well as in the nonprofit sector, of measuring this entrepreneurial achievement of social value (Dees, 1998; Austin and al., 2006). As a result, it does not really succeed in considering and preserving the communitarian dimension of these ventures (figure 2).

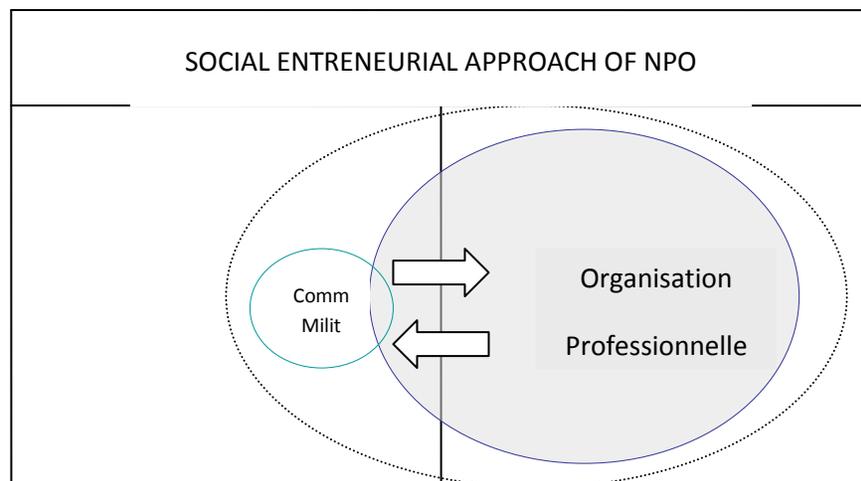


Figure 2. The social entrepreneurship approach to nonprofit organizations.

Social entrepreneurship moves nonprofit organizations closer to for profit ventures. At first, this involves adopting certain management practices, but these means may soon introduce new ends. Social entrepreneurship appears as a pragmatic approach essentially focused on technical and economic efficiency, i.e. the ratio between means and results. Services delivered are units for which it is possible to calculate a unit cost of production. Because of the difficulty of measuring them these ratios will not include all the indirect values mentioned in part 1; social bonds and

development and democratic progress, whereas these other values may justify higher costs. These social utilities are obviously hard to quantify and optimize, but they may also contradict technical and economic performance (Tisdell, 2001 ; Valéau, 2009). Thus, social entrepreneurship tends to turn nonprofit organizations into more productive units. It helps them to compete with for profit ventures but, in doing so, often take them away from the socio-political dimensions of their action.

3. Institutional entrepreneurship and the resistance of the nonprofit sector to the “*great transformation*”

The evolution of the third sector within the global market society can be reanalyzed through a series of theoretical frameworks: new institutionalism, stake holders, social capital and institutional entrepreneurship. It is our view that the main difference between social entrepreneurship and the traditional approach to nonprofit organizations does not only concern efficiency, but also has to do with the place this sector wants to take within the global market system: does it want to survive as part of this system or, be more at the cutting edge, trying to influence its development, advocating for new, more ethical rules of governance (figure 3). These two views constitute different strategies serving fundamentally different visions: traditional nonprofit organizations tend to take a stand as a form of resistance whereas social entrepreneurs seem to consider that the war is over and try to adapt in order to survive. Indeed, until recently, governments from all over the world were doing everything they could to set the global market free and were “helping” nonprofit organizations to turn into social entrepreneurs. But then came the global crisis.

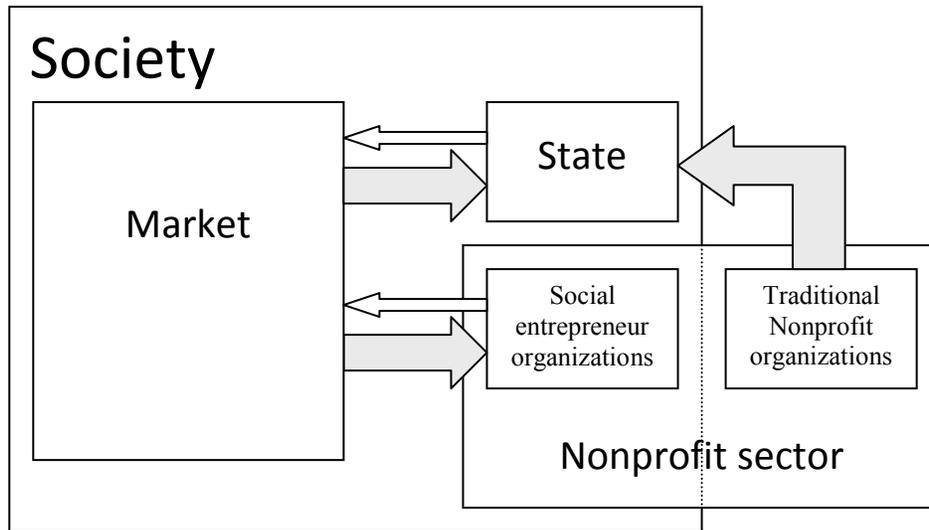


Figure 3. The place of traditional nonprofit organizations and social entrepreneurship in society

“If you can’t beat it, joint it!” This could be the leitmotiv of the social entrepreneurship approach to nonprofit organizations. The advent of the global market society introduced new rules and new expectations. The social entrepreneurship movement considers that the nonprofit sector has to adapt. According to new institutionalism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983 ; Powell, 2007), this adaptation is not only economic; it is also about social legitimacy. Legitimacy refers to acknowledgement by other actors and groups of actors of the relevance of one’s behaviors. Acknowledgement has to do with social norms: a set of unwritten, unspoken and sometimes unconscious rules that define what is appropriate and inappropriate to do, to say or even to think in a given set of circumstances. In a global market system, legitimacy is, to a great extent, synonymous with efficiency. In the context of this “institution”, social entrepreneurship may actually be the right answer. Productivity is becoming the nonprofit sector’s “iron cage”. As a result, the social entrepreneurship model of nonprofit organizations is spreading all over the world.

Social norms in a given community have to do with an emergent culture (Becker, 1982 ; Durkheim, 1915 Dimaggio & Powell, 1983), but also, sometimes, with deliberate strategies of control (Kanter, 1968). Another useful framework for understanding the nonprofit sector is the stakeholders theory (Freeman, 1984). Freeman defines them as groups concerned by the organization or able to influence its goals. In nonprofit organizations, the beneficiaries are not always the payers; the service is often given for free or for a price lower than the market value. Nonprofit organizations are very concerned about their beneficiaries but also have to consider their financiers' points of view. The power held by this particular stakeholder is the direct counterpart of the dependency of the organization toward it (Emerson, 1958). Indeed, social entrepreneurship aims to limit the dependency of nonprofit organizations on public institutions, but, on the other hand, one can ascertain that all resources tend to involve dependency. Obtaining donations requires specific marketing once called "charity business" which has often been criticized for escalating emotions. Creating new for profit activities in order to finance nonprofit ventures may permit independence from public institutions but is subject to the rules of the market. Competition requires a reduction in production costs that could involve managerial pressure and a stagnation of wages that could contradict nonprofit traditional values. Social entrepreneurship considers public grants to be the worst source of income. It is true that dictatorships always start by cutting back on government's aid, whereas democratic governments generally acknowledge their ability to take charge of new or forgotten demands. However, over the last decade, governments have been so inspired by social entrepreneurship that they have begun to treat nonprofit organizations just like businesses in subcontracting some of their work out to them. In fact, all financial resources involve a form of dependency and require a level of

accountability in return. Before the 2008 crisis, all financial stakeholders, government, the market and even citizens, seemed to be preoccupied with the same thing: productivity.

However, nonprofit organizations are not totally helpless when facing up to their financial partners within the global market; they develop some unique social capital that can be used in negotiations (Schneider, 2009; Putman, 1995). The concept of “social capital” belongs to French sociologist Bourdieu (1964) who used it to explain how elite families transmit their dominant positions through the generations. Putman (1995) and more recently Schneider (2009) reintroduced it in the nonprofit context; these authors define social capital as a reciprocal, enforceable trust that enables these organizations to gain access to resources. Part of the trust that stakeholders develop for nonprofit organizations comes from the managerial skills they use to efficiently achieve their mission, but more and more scholars also emphasize their ability to preserve their grassroots (eg. Batliwala, 2002; Eliasoph 2009; Graddy & Wang, 2009; Sobeck, Agius & Mayers, 2007). Tisdell’s model (2009) actually shows that the relationship between technical efficiency and fund raising is at first very strong, but later tends to decline and even become negative. This is an Icarus Paradox (Miller, 1986) where efficiency can be a source of success, but too much of it may down the line be negatively perceived as a loss of grassroots base. Nonprofit organizations can be seen as actions by the people, for the people and with the people. It stands as an organizationally embedded non-transferable specific resource (Sharma, 2009)² constituting a competitive advantage (Penrose, 1959). This connection represents something that the market or states would like to share with nonprofit organizations. This access

² Sharma (2009) about family business

can be negotiated. This margin of negotiation can also be found in Crozier and Friedberg (1977), they consider that actors can find within the system possibilities to serve their own purposes.

The institutional entrepreneur theory goes one step further: not only does it consider the possibility for actors to achieve their own goals in a given system, it foresees the eventuality of even changing the latter. Institutional entrepreneurship may be new institutionalism's second wind. It complements the influence of social systems on individuals with its reverse. This reverse enables the theory to think endogenous change. The concept of institutional entrepreneurship was introduced in 1988, by Di Maggio himself. More recently Battilana et al. (2009) in the annals of the Academy of Management gave an overview of this approach. For them, institutional entrepreneurship reintroduces agency theory in a positive manner: nonconformist, at times disobedient actors may be the only ones able to challenge social institutions. According to Watzlavick's lexic of change (1974), institutional entrepreneurs do not limit themselves to finding opportunities to realise their vision within a given system (1st order change), they change the system in order to create fundamentally new possibilities (2nd order change). Creating a new system may sometimes be just a side effect of nonprofit action, but for some actors creating new values and new patterns of behavior may be part of the program (Cooperrider & Passmore, 1991).

Crozier and Friedberg (1977) explained how actors could exploit incertitudes within the system such as the absence of rules relating to a given point or contradictory rules, to achieve their own purposes. From an institutional entrepreneur's perspective, these undeterminations become a form of "decrystallization" (Lewin, 1952) or "confusion" (Watzlavick, 1974) propitious to a change in the system. The 2008 crisis was about economic disequilibrium, but also about people's doubts about the relevance of the system globalization has created over the last decade

and governments hesitations about the part they should play. This climate of confusion and hesitation may serve as an opportunity for institutional nonprofit entrepreneurs to advocate and promote changes for a more ethical form of governance.

Conclusion

The 2008 crisis could have represented a unique opportunity for the nonprofit sector to become part of what could have been a new globalized ethical governance. According to Battilana and al. (2009), the demand is there: “*with most countries facing a major financial and economic crisis (...), the demand for institutional change is increasing among organization members and citizens the world over.*” These authors add “*the question of how to reform existing institutions has assumed greater urgency*”. The question is as much about the change that has to be achieved as how to start it. People have demanded that their governments address this problem and they are now turning to the nonprofit sector. What kind of contribution can it bring? More than their ability to efficiently compete with businesses, nonprofit organizations seem, today, to be valued for their vision, their innovation and, to a certain extent, for their ability to remain a counter power.

One of the cornerstone of this socio-political action approach to management science concerns how nonprofit organizations can or should be run by its stakeholders, how they should deal with institutional norms. This paper aims to be part of the conversation going on within management science. Drawing on Simon (1948), it is important to remember that management science can be defined as a science applied to decision making and action. Different decision and action criteria

can be considered. We can therefore reply to De Gaulejac (2005) that society is not suffering from too much management but from the pervasiveness of the ultra-liberalist approach. This approach confines the nonprofit sector to the economic sphere. Throughout history, the nonprofit sector has always acted as a counter-power counter-balancing the excesses and injustices of the great transformation. However, drawing on Laville's (2010) "associationist" approach, we argue that the nonprofit sector can only play this role as long as it keeps one foot in the economic sphere and one foot in the socio-political sphere. New institutional entrepreneurship models of management could bring this role to the forefront by emphasizing socio-political effectiveness.

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